2: Belgrave G-3 (1945) 1946 MD1 Syria MD1
Alawite MD7

A 622 792 554 A [791] sense as he could get away with. The story goes that two Alawite priests, whose fortunes were at a low ebb, proclaimed that a dying shepherd boy was the incarnation of Ali. Their idea was to build him a tomb and make it a specially notable shrine to attract large numbers of worshippers. However, the boy, Sulaiman Murshid, survived, and with the aid of one or two ingenious "miracles," which were to earn him the title of "phosphorous boots" in the Royal Navy, he began to build up his reputation as a divine incarnation. He is alleged to have brought forth water from a rock by a contraption of rubber tubes running down inside his sleeve and to have gained many adherents by such wonders. Subsequently the two priests disappear from the story and Sulaiman led a chequered life, during which he greatly increased his land-holdings and therefore his wealth—the Alawite mountains grow the once-famous Latakia tobacco—by somewhat forceful methods. At one time he was on the wrong side of the French Mandatory Authorities and suffered a period of banishment, but he later obtained their favour and in due course became a Deputy in the Syrian Parliament.

S [661] A [595] 669 S 669 When I was posted to Latakia in October, 1944, Sulaiman Effendi was still a Deputy, but very much in the opposition, as he was held in forced residence by the Syrian authorities in Damascus and not allowed to return to his native mountains. He has an agreeable number of wives, one in each of his various villages, but his chief wife, Umm Fatteh, was at that time acting for her absent "Lord" and entertaining lavishly in their mountain residence at Jobit Burghal. Then came an unfortunate difference of opinion between the followers of Umm Fatteh and the local government authorities, the latter's gendarmes suffering a reverse at the hands of the former, who were found to be exceedingly well-armed. Such open flouting of their authority was intolerable to the Damascus Government, and they sent up a large force of gendarmes under an experienced campaigner, Commandant Muhammed Ali. The subsequent proceedings were complicated and there was much political activity, but the French sent Alawite and North African troops to Jobit Burghal to prevent bloodshed and remained in occupation up there during the ensuing weeks, much to the disgust of Muhammed Ali, who was confident of defeating the rebels. Meanwhile Fatteh, eldest son of Sulaiman Effendi, had returned home and was able to practise his fluent French on the various French Political Officers whose duties took them to Jobit Burghal. When the fighting broke out in Damascus and it became clear that the Syrians were determined to stake all they had on a bid for complete independence, Sulaiman Murshid found himself in a most awkward position. After a certain amount of political bargaining, he stood up in the Syrian Parliament and announced a complete change of heart, admitted that he had been wrongly guided by foreign advice, and placed himself and all his followers at the disposal of the Syrian Nationalists. Having thus rallied to the cause of independence, he could no longer be detained in Damascus, and accordingly returned home to his mountain fastness. In addition to the French Moroccan force, this now contained a British "tentacle" in the shape of Captain N——, who was camping up there with Jeep and wireless and liaising with all and sundry, albeit finding his French

prosperity of the region during the last twelve years resulted in the benefit of the Sheiks who were quick to seize the meaning of the expansion in agriculture brought about by the introduction of the machines. They laid claim to vast areas of the best lands without opposition or control by the Government, and then rented these lands to machine owners, thereby getting rich at the expense of others and depriving the tribesmen of the possibility of tilling their own lands.

The concentration of land in the hands of the Sheik and his family is greatest in the Shammar tribe and in the Jubur whether though the Chiefs of the tribe own the best lands, but the Tay tribesmen took to agriculture earlier than either the Shammar or the Jubur and many Tay villages are owned by the peasants.

This short glimpse covers the Arab population of Jazirah, and we turn now to the other elements in the population.

II. The Kurds

The Kurds have been and are a vital element in the development of Jazirah. Their original country is the mountains north of the plain. Their language and customs have dominated the country so that even the city dwellers of Mardin and Nisibin speak Kurdish besides Arabic and Turkish. The Kurdish migration to Jazirah started in earnest after the failure of the Kurdish rebellion against the reforms of Mustafa Kamal. Some Kurdish tribal chiefs sentenced to death migrated with their tirbes to Syria. The French authorities welcomed them and they occupied the lands directly south of the border, greatly increasing in this way the number of Kurds already in the region. The Arab tribes saw their lands diminishing, but not being yet land conscious, they were satisfied to claim tribute from the Kurdish villages, which was paid for several years.

For the first time in perhaps nine hundred years, the French established law and order in Jazirah. The Kurds, farmers in their own country, began cultivating the plains. The land being fertile, the crops were good. The French authorities treated the Kurds well and the news of good crops and unbiased government treatment reached the Kurds just across the border. Migration became a continuous operation from the mountains to the villages of the plain. There were no obstacles to this movement either on the Turkish or the Syrian side, and the immigrants joined their cousins and relatives across the railway line. For this reason, and because a census was never taken, it is very difficult to estimate the number of Kurds in the Jazirah.